Across the Border

MEXICO AND ITS HERITAGE, by Ernest Gruening. $6. 8¾ x 5¾; 728 pp. New York: *The Century Company.*

THIS is more than a book; it is a sort of one-volume encyclopedia. Mr. Gruening became interested in Mexico in 1922, and, unlike most Americans who write about that unhappy country, he decided to find out something about it. So he crossed the Rio Grande and remained six months. Two years later he went back, and again in 1925, 1926 and 1927. Meanwhile, he had acquired a sound knowledge of Spanish, and set himself to plowing through the vast literature dealing with Mexican affairs. He read not only the histories that are in every library; he went to the original sources. More, he read acres of government reports, pamphlets, magazines, newspapers. Yet more, he scraped acquaintance with Mexicans of all sorts, from the President of the Republic down to humble peons in the backwoods. His journeys took him into twenty-four of the twenty-eight Mexican States. He made contacts with the leaders of all the Mexican factions, political, religious, literary and economic. He carried a notebook and a camera, an alert eye and a hospitable ear. Then, having devoted five years to the amassing of his materials, he sat down to write his book. It is a truly huge piece of work, carefully planned, admirably written, and copiously documented. The whole record of Mexico's dark and sanguinary troubles is in its text and footnotes. Nothing essential, past or present, seems to have been overlooked.

Mr. Gruening—he is a former managing editor of the Boston *Traveler*, the New York *Tribune* and the *Nation* (a curious combination, certainly!) and is now the editor of a paper in Portland, Maine—writes as an American, but he does not make the common mistake of estimating Mexican motives and acts in terms of American experience. The history of the Republic differs at almost every step from that of the United States, and its people are almost as unlike Americans as the Russians or the Turks. The first American settlers brought with them a tradition of independent thinking and a talent for self-government; the first comers in Mexico were simply unconscionable exploiters, with no interest in the country and no desire to make it fit to live in. Mr. Gruening makes much of this difference, and very wisely. It explains the enormous difficulties that confront the enlightened minority of Mexicans today. They dream of lifting their country out of its wallow, but they face the solid opposition of a populace that yet lingers in barbarism. That populace cannot think; it can scarcely formulate intelligible desires; oppressed for centuries, it has almost lost the elemental capacity to feel. The revolutions that afflict the land mean nothing to it save chances for loot; it has been ground down and exploited by the successive republics and oligarchies quite as much as it was by the old monarchy. The church, its ostensible friend, has only aided in its degradation. It seems hopeless.

Nevertheless, there may be a way out. It will be years and maybe centuries before the masses of the Mexican people can be brought up to the level of even the Mississippi Baptists, but in the upper class there is a salubrious stirring, and in the course of time it may lead to something. The successive governments, though they commonly come in on waves of blood, show a more or less steady improvement. Men of genuine public spirit emerge from the ruck of grafters and assassins. Beginnings have been made in ordering the national finances,

in reforming the archaic land system, in curbing the ferocity of foreign exploiters, in setting up schools, even in maintaining public order. Reform is still largely in the hands of a lunatic fringe; there are attempts to leap to forms of democracy that still remain purely theoretical, even in the mob-ridden United States. But the old despairist acceptance of fraud and imbecility, disorder and rapine, as natural and inevitable seems to be going out. There are Mexicans who tire of the chaos and make rational plans to end it. With that vast, inert mass of barbarous Indians and even more barbarous half-breeds confronting them, they take on a truly staggering task. But if Oklahoma can be civilized, as seems likely, then perhaps there is a chance for Mexico.

Two powerful agencies work against every effort to put the country on its legs. One is the intransigent opposition of the church, which is still Spanish and monarchist in sympathy after a hundred years; the other is the chronic dishonesty and bullying of the United States. The history of our relations with Mexico is an almost unbroken record of infamy. We have been false to every trust, and brutally self-seeking whenever there was an opportunity to play the good neighbor. American support has always gone, not to the best Mexicans, but to the worst. No patriotic citizen of the country can lay his plans for sound reforms without taking into account the probability of Yankee opposition and interference. But both of these difficulties, in the course of time, may be resolved. The appointment of Dwight W. Morrow to the Mexican ambassadorship seems to indicate that Washington is preparing to play a more decent rôle hereafter, despite the fact that the preposterous Kellogg is still Secretary of State. And the church, facing a genuine rebellion against its obscurantism, in which Catholic Mexicans stand side by side with freethinkers, shows signs of attempting a compromise. In this last struggle both sides have hit below the belt, and so there is extraordinary bitterness. But even bitterness yields to time. Let the United States keep out of the mess, and soon or late the fugitive bishops will go back—not, perhaps, as the medieval lords they used to be, but at all events with quite as much freedom to transact their legitimate business as their legitimate business needs.

Mr. Gruening goes into all of these matters frankly and at great length. His sympathies, obviously, are with the enlightened minority which seeks to cast off the remaining vestiges of the Spanish inheritance, and set Mexico on the way of progress as a modern state. He has little use for Diaz, he leans against the oil concessionists and other carpet-baggers, and he is tartly critical of the church. But he is by no means a special pleader. Both sides have hearings in his book, and he is at great pains to set forth the case of every man he opposes. He has done a good job. If what he has written is widely read a new understanding will get into the relations between Mexico and the United States, and with that better understanding, it is to be hoped, there will come a greater decency.

American Worthies

WHO'S WHO IN AMERICA, edited by Albert Nelson Marquis. $8.50. 8⅞ x 7; 2488 pp. Chicago: *The A. N. Marquis Company.*

"Who's Who in America" grows fatter with each new edition. The first, for 1899–1900, ran to 827 pages and contained biographies of 8602 men and women. The new one, for 1928–29, has 2488 pages and includes no less than 28,805 sketches, of which 3931 appear for the first time. As usual, the work is notable for both its extraordinary inclusions and its unaccountable omissions. All sorts of local worthies, especially if they be of theological or literary habit, seem to find it easy to get in. So do many obscure newspaper editors, ninth-rate bankers, puerile pedagogues and other such right-thinkers. But there appears to be relatively little hospitality to men and women of unusual attainments and odd minds. I look in vain, for example, for Dr. Paul De Kruif. And for Roland Hugins.